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NOTE ON THE DISCOVERY OF COMET *b*, 1896.

The following extracts from Professor LEWIS SWIFT's letters to the LICK Observatory, relating to the discovery of Comet *b*, 1896, will be of general interest:

Under date of Thursday, April 16th, he writes: "I telegraphed you this A. M. of the discovery of a comet. I ran across it while comet-seeking ten days ago; but, after watching some time and observing no motion, I pronounced it a nebula. Monday night [i. e. April 13th] I ran across it again, and my suspicion was that it might be a comet after all; but before I could find it with the large equatorial, a cloud obscured it, so I only saw it with the 4½-inch for about thirty seconds. The next night was cloudy. Last night [April 15th] I had both telescopes ready, and in bright twilight picked up the object with the 4½-inch, and soon had it in the field of the 16-inch. I immediately pronounced it a comet, which, when it grew a little darker, I saw had an excessively faint tail. From the circles I made its position $\alpha = 3^h 39^m$; $\delta = +15^\circ 40'$. It is brighter than it was ten days ago. In consequence of the absence of the telegrapher from the mountain, I was unable to telegraph last night."

On April 24th, Professor SWIFT writes again: "That ten days was an indefinite quantity, as, after reflection, my memory tells me it was several days previous to that that I ran across with the comet-seeker an object, pretty low down in the southwest, which greatly resembled the comet. I assumed this to be N. G. C. 1535. Soon after, I ran across a similar-appearing object, which I took to be N. G. C. 1600, and, again, another, which I thought might be N. G. C. 1453. Now, whether any one of these was the comet I am unable to affirm. My belief is that some or all were."

Professor SWIFT adds: "I think the date of discovery should be April 13th."

I have plotted the three nebulae mentioned by Professor SWIFT, and also the path of the comet, computing its positions for April 3.5 and April 8.5, in addition to its positions since it was observed at Mount Hamilton. The chart shows that the comet passed about three degrees west of N. G. C. 1453 some time during the afternoon or evening of April 5th. It was then about one-half as bright as at the assumed date of discovery (April 13th).

The comet's nearest approach to N. G. C. 1535 was about April 1st, when it passed some twelve degrees west of it. It was at no time nearer than fourteen degrees to N. G. C. 1600.

It seems quite probable, therefore, that Professor SWIFT actually saw the comet some time about the 4th or 5th of April, mistaking it for N. G. C. 1453. R. G. AITKEN.

April 29, 1896.

PHOTOGRAPHS OF COMET PERRINE *a*, 1896.

On six mornings, those of February 18th, 19th, 20th, 22d, 23d, 25th, I secured photographs of this comet, using the large DALLMEYER portrait lens belonging to Hon. W. M. PIERSON, which I had temporarily fastened to the mounting of the six-inch equatorial telescope. The exposures varied in length from forty minutes to ninety-five minutes. All but one of the negatives showed the comet with at least a trace of a tail; in the first one taken, the tail was nearly or quite a degree long. Unfavorable conditions interrupted the series until March 9th, when, the comet having become an evening object, visible in the northwest, an exposure of three hours was secured. The resulting negative represented the comet with a tail about a degree and a half in length. No especially interesting features were detected in this series of photographs. A. L. C.

PECULIAR PHENOMENON SEEN AT VISALIA, APRIL 18, 1896.*

Yesterday, at 11:30 A. M., the attention of several people was attracted to a cloud in the southern heavens, wearing the colors of the rainbow. When first noticed, the hues were distinct and bright.

The sky at the time was partially overcast with light cirro-cumuli, traveling eastward at a low altitude. Through and above these could be plainly seen a horizontal stratum of white cloud, which exhibited the effect mentioned. In less than a minute the colors disappeared, and the cloud again became white. Twice again within fifteen minutes the peculiar change of hue was observed, but after the first time red, purple, and a light blue were the only shades that became distinct.—*From the Visalia Delta, April 19th.*

* Communicated by GEORGE W. STEWART, Esq.